

The Conservation ConneCTion: *Building a Connecticut Collections Conservation Collaborative*

1. Need and Rationale

Connecticut has, 222 history museums (172 of which are house museums), 12 art museums, 5 natural history museums, 11 science/technology museums, 16 nature centers, 8 children's museums, 5 zoo/aquaria, 4 state historic sites, 9 state parks with historic sites within, 195 public libraries 190 historical societies, 169 local governments and over 50 private and public colleges and universities, all of which have collections of varying type and significance and all of which have conservation concerns.

Connecticut is a small New England state. Connecticut Colony formed in 1639 under the Fundamental Orders, the first modern constitution, was one of the original 13 colonies and the 5th to become a state. It has a long history of "Yankee ingenuity". Connecticut and its citizens have played a prominent role in the history of the United States.

From Welk shells to a whaling ship to a painting by Wyeth to Washington's Revolutionary War correspondence to Jonathan Trumbull, the breath of cultural treasures entrusted to Connecticut's museums, archives and libraries is breathtaking. These collections are of great local, national, and in some cases, international significance. However much of what we know about the conservation needs of these collections is anecdotal. Four surveys, limited to specific types of collecting institutions, have been conducted over the past 20 years and their results closely align to the findings of the *Heritage Health Index*.

The Connecticut attendees to the Connecting to Collections Summit in Washington, DC (representing an art museum, public library, historical museum and historical society); the State Archivist; and a representative from the Connecticut Humanities Council (CHC) met in September 2007 to review the Summit and determine a course of action. Based on their review of the previous Connecticut studies, their reading of a *Public Trust at Risk*, and their extensive personal experience in their respective areas of practice, they identified:

- Funding
- Staff Training/Education,
- Disaster and Emergency Planning and coordination,
- Sharing of knowledge and expertise between organizations, and
- Improving cooperation and collaboration across types of collection holding institutions,

as major needs for collecting institutions across the state if the collections they are entrusted with are to survive the 21st Century.

The group also observed that effective statewide conservation planning in Connecticut has to take into account the historical imperative of institutional and governmental self

reliance; the fact that Connecticut's informal state motto is the "land of steady habits"; the extremes in size and funding in every category of collecting institution; and the financial stress most collecting institutions are experiencing.

Connecticut's basic form of local government is the town. There are no counties and few regional government structures. There is a strong tradition within the towns of home rule and local self reliance. Thus, there is no tradition of statewide efforts to conserve Connecticut's cultural collections. Moreover, there is no one group, public or private, that serves as a statewide umbrella organization addressing collection conservation needs, advocating for more resources and coordinating training for all of Connecticut's collecting institutions.

There are many organizations at the state and local levels that concern themselves with these issues and their missions overlap with each other. For instance the Connecticut State Historical Records Advisory Board and the Connecticut Coordinating Committee for the Promotion of History are two groups that provide a statewide focus to issues relating to historical collections. The state's five tourism districts and 5 regional and 50 local Arts Councils bring some museums and cultural heritage organizations together regionally and locally.

The Statewide agencies and organizations that will be involved in the planning process provide a variety of programs and services to their constituents, but none address conservation issues across the wide spectrum of collections that exist in Connecticut. The Office of State Archaeology, established as a part of the Connecticut State Museum of Natural History, provides local municipalities the technical assistance they need to help preserve archaeological resources within their communities. The State Archives and the Museum of Connecticut History are functions of the Connecticut State Library (CSL). CSL takes a leadership role in Archives and statewide library development, but not museums. CSL, through its Division of Library Development provides leadership, funding, education, and statewide services that enhance local library service. CSL's Office of the Public Records Administrator is responsible for designing and implementing the Public Records Program for local government agencies and for state agencies within the executive department of government. This office administers the Historic Records Program which each year provides over \$1.5 million to municipalities for historic preservation and records management activities. The League of Connecticut History encourages and supports the activities of the Connecticut's historical organizations, CHC is committed to increasing public awareness of Connecticut's truly remarkable history and through its various programs assist the state's museums, heritage organizations and historical societies to bring the essential stories of Connecticut's past to the public. CHC is developing an online Heritage Resource Center which will provide technical assistance to heritage institutions. The Connecticut Commission on Culture and Tourism (CCT) seeks to preserve and promote Connecticut's cultural and tourism assets in order to enhance the quality of life and economic vitality of the State. CCT's Historic Preservation and Museum Division administers a broad range of federal and state programs that identify, register and protect the buildings, sites, structures, districts and

objects that comprise Connecticut's cultural heritage. The Division has a major new preservation funding initiative focused on buildings but not as yet address collections.

Establishing the Conservation Conne**CT**ion will improve communication and provide needed coordination of expertise and resources to more adequately identify and address the need for safe conditions for collections; emergency plans for all collecting institutions; trained and knowledgeable staff to care for collections and adequate financial support for Connecticut's diverse collecting institutions.

2. The Planning Process

The core planning team will include representatives from the CSL; CCT; CHC, the State Museum of Natural History and the League of Connecticut History; as well as the four representatives to the Connecting to Collections Summit. The planning team will also seek out representation from various collecting institutions to insure a broad geographic and institutional mix. The CSL will serve as convener. A Project Manager will be contracted with to oversee the project. The planning team will consult with the department of Information and Library Science at Southern Connecticut State University; the New England Document Conservation Center and local conservation professionals such as those at Yale University and the University of Connecticut.

The expected results include:

- White Paper outlining the state of collection conservation in Connecticut
- The development of the Conservation Conne**CT**ion, a collections conservation collaborative representing and open to all collection holding institutions, including, but not limited to museums, libraries, archives, and historical societies.
- Identification of those institutions that have not yet developed emergency plans.
- Identification and prioritization of significant items and collections in need of conservation and digitization as appropriate
- Identification of staff training and education needs
- Identification of conservation expertise within the state and region
- Establishment of a Mentoring Program to enable librarians, curators, and archivists to learn from veteran conservators and other conservation experts
- Increased awareness by local and state government and the private sector of the significance of the collections in Connecticut and need to conserve them
- Conservation Symposium

The White Paper and the Symposium will inform decisions made by the planning team in establishing priorities as the Conservation Conne**CT**ion moves forward. They will also serve as a call to action by the public and private sector.

In 1998, under a NHPRC grant, a survey of the critical records needs of the membership of the Connecticut Town Clerk's Association and the Connecticut League of Historical Organizations was conducted. In 2001 a similar survey was conducted with the state's public libraries. As part of the planning process, the project manager will review the responses and findings from these surveys and report on any follow-up activities that

took place. The Project Manager will seek to identify other surveys that have been conducted, identify which institutions have had MAP, CAP, or other assessment projects/surveys. The data will be compiled into a database. This database will both inform the current planning process and serve as a benchmark against which progress can be measured. The Project Manager will also compile information on conservation training activities that have and are taking place in the state and the source of their funding.

Each of the organizational partners will be responsible for communicating with their members or constituent groups and for insuring that the interests of the institutions they represent or work with are represented in the planning process. Statewide and regional organizations, for example, will be asked to include the Conservation ConneCTion on annual meeting agendas. The partner institutions will also help identify locations for regional meetings and focus groups.

Mailing lists will be established for both print and electronic communication to all collecting institutions in the state. A Blog will be established for both the dissemination of information and for collecting feedback from institutions around the state.

Utilizing the media expertise of the partnering organizations and the various collecting institutions in the state, there will be a constant flow of informative articles, op ed pieces, interviews with representatives from libraries, museums, historical societies and archives, as well as “investigative” reports aimed at a television audience throughout the planning process.

The major product of this planning process will be the establishment of the Collection ConneCTion. Additionally, the planning process will generate:

- A White Paper and Symposium to increase public awareness and establish an action agenda
- Several Databases
 - Survey Results
 - Significant collections
 - Individual and Institutional Expertise
- A Collection ConneCTion Website
- A prioritized list of at risk significant items and/or collection
- Self assessment survey for all collecting institutions
- A Conservation Wiki that the CHC Heritage Resource Center; CSL’s CT Webjunction library development website; and other organizations can link to thereby making consistent information available to a wide audience through sites they may be more familiar with.

3. Project Resources: Budget and Personnel

The State Librarian will serve as the Project Director. The Project Manager will be the key person responsible for carrying out the planning process. The Project Manager will conduct the research described above; coordinate all meetings; prepare minutes and reports; facilitate regional meetings and other information gathering activities as needed. The Project Manager will be a contract employee of CSL. CSL will utilize the services of appropriate agency staff as needed, including the agency's Web Resources Librarian, the agency's Preservation Librarian, and the agency's photoduplicating and mailing services. Agency staff representing the State Archives, Division of Library Development, and the Office of Public Records Administrator will also be involved either directly on the planning team or as resource persons for the team.

Grant funds will be used to contract with the Project Manager. The State Library will use its own resources to support the work of the Project Manager and the planning team. CSL will provide office space, supplies, telephone, and computer for the project manager and meeting space for the planning team.

The project will last 18 months. The Conservation ConneCTion will evolve into a statewide collaborative supported by the CSL and other agencies and organizations in the state that have a stake in sustaining efforts to conserve collections. CSL has a long track record of maintaining and supporting collaborative efforts in its work with libraries, archivists and town clerks. CSL has also been successful in garnering support from the legislature for conservation and preservation activities.

Information resulting from the planning process will be shared among three main target groups.

- **Collecting Institutions** will receive regular updates during the planning process (via the Web, electronically and in print); copies of all reports including the White Paper; and invitations to the Conservation Symposium. Organizations will also be asked to distribute information to their membership through their own channels
- **Government Leaders and Private Funders** will receive press releases; copies of all reports including the White Paper; and invitations to the Conservation Symposium
- The **General Public** will be reached through a variety of media including print, broadcast and the Web.

The long term benefits of the Conservation ConneCTion will be to foster collaboration and communication across a wide spectrum of collecting institutions; provide a mechanism for these institutions to speak with a unified voice on conservation matters, particularly when seeking state support for ongoing conservation; coordinate continuing education activities; and to align the various funding organizations efforts to maximize funding for conservation of collections thereby positioning Connecticut's collecting institutions to effectively address the conservation measures that must be taken if these valuable collections are to survive for the enjoyment and enlightenment of future generations.

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